



## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

## A rare variant of dissociative amnesia: Back to the past

Dissociative amnesia (DA) has been rarely reported in literature. Its attribution to dissociation underlines the deficit in self, in addition to autobiographical memory (AM). We report a case of a rare variant of DA with a specific manifestation of “back to the past.”

The patient was a 17-year-old student with no previous psychiatric history. He denied substance use, and had no underlying physical illness. At the age of 14, he had joined a junior high school rugby team and performed well. At the age of 16, he had gone to another city about 300 km away from his home town to join a famous rugby team.

One afternoon, when he was 17 years old, he fainted while being asked to do squat jumps by a senior player as a punishment. When he resumed consciousness 20 minutes later, he claimed that he was 15 years old, and that he was living in his hometown. The time was 1 year and 9 months previous, and he did not recognize his present coach and teammates. At the emergency department, his vital signs were stable, and the lab data showed negative results with the exception of elevated creatine kinase (602 U/L). A neurologist was consulted, and no focal neurological deficits were found. Electrical encephalography (EEG) showed normal findings. Ten months before this retrograde amnesia, he had received a head concussion. A brain CT showed no intracranial lesion at that moment.

Psychiatrists were consulted during this emergency visit. No psychotic symptoms were detected, and there were no problems with his calculation, attention, and abstract thinking. However, he suffered a memory gap of 1 year and 9 months. The psychiatrist told him that the examination results were non-remarkable and gave him reassurance.

About 24 hours after the faint, he regained his memory and self-identity. He said that, being bullied constantly, he was under pressure after he had joined the rugby team. However, he denied insomnia, nightmares, and suicidal ideations. He said that the happiest time in his life was the previous time (1 year and 9 months). After this event, he went back to his hometown. Ten months later, he represented his school while competing in a shot put event.

The patient fulfilled several characteristics distinguishable from organic amnesia: (1) disturbance of self-identity; (2) retrograde amnesia with sparing of anterograde amnesia; and (3) clear psychological distress preceding the amnesia [1]. All the organic causes were excluded after a series of examinations.

DA is usually connected with stress [1]. These “back-to-the-past” patients are dissociated and re-start their life to protect their self-identity [1,2]. In this case, the patient returned to his old glory days. A 32-year-old woman, went back to the age of 18 years, to meet her first love [1].

AM, which is considered pathognomonic for DA, is associated with the prefrontal cortex (PFC) [3]. In patients with DA, reduced activities in the right PFC were shown in resting PET studies [4]. In contrast, activation studies showed greater activities in the PFC [5]. The association between self-identity and AM is reciprocal [1], and the longitudinal shift of self in our case may involve more than the PFC. Arzy et al. [2] argued that alteration of the posterior parietal cortex, which is important in the “self,” might reflect the distinct presentation of these “back-to-the-past” patients.

More and more, authors have emphasized psychosocial attributions, even in organic amnesic patients. This case reminds psychiatrists of maintaining a psychological perspective in clinical practice.

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